

Gleaner



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Am a person within myself Loving and hating,
Laughing and crying,
Content and angry,
All at once.

If only
I could divorce myself
and become
Just loving, laughing and content.
But I cannot.
For life does not call
For eternal happiness
One must hate
To know the glory of love,
One must cry
To find the joys of laughter
And one must have anger
To experience contentment.
— Wanda M. Perugini

Red skys in morning
Sailors take u arning
Startles the gull into flight
Unexpected thunder
Throws the course asunder
None are prepared for the fight

Upon many tide.
The sailors do ride
See the war respect at high noon
The casons hang.
The wind rearrang
Controlled by the stars and the moon

Red skys at night
The union delight
Sought mare ternally
that mass grows desper
thigh is the sold skeeper
the worst are to that see
the form Hand

Worlds Overlap

by Helen Fitting

Born to discover the world of nature, she wandered amid woody green forests, and bright flowers. A passing buck stopped to stare with beautiful wild eyes, then passed silently out of sight. She sat on a grey lichened rock pondering nature's cyclic existance. while a handful of damp leaf mulch sifted through her fingers, exuding a faint earth-scent of nutritive decay. A newt filled stream bubbled over rose quarts crystals, and sparkled entrancingly into her eyes. All natures forms, shapes, colors, and motions became entwined in the jumbling, tumbling stream. Glistening sunlit reflections blended into intense whiteness Understanding became clear Later she sought to discover the world of Humans. Loneliness, sorrow, pleasure, anger, calmness, each dwelt in her spirit. as each strove for dominance. Again she turned to the mirroring waters of her native stream for guidance, and when she knelt over the passing brook to drink of its wisdom, she saw her reflection shifting into reflections of every persons face that every existed. Every age, every emotion, every expression rippled together. And her dark pupils filled with shining lights as pains, joys, sorows and fears fused into a brilliant opalescence. Understanding became clear Worlds Overlap

Dreamer

Let me fall in love with a dreamer; the others never understand what it is like to be with your heart lost at sea and your feet never left the sand.

Tell me what it means to be totally open, alive, and free . . .

I have loved my share of vagabonds and more than my share of prep raised men. I've slept on the beach and high class prom did reach, but they're the same in the end.

Vagabonds' drug escape reality. . . Proper men corrupt society. . .

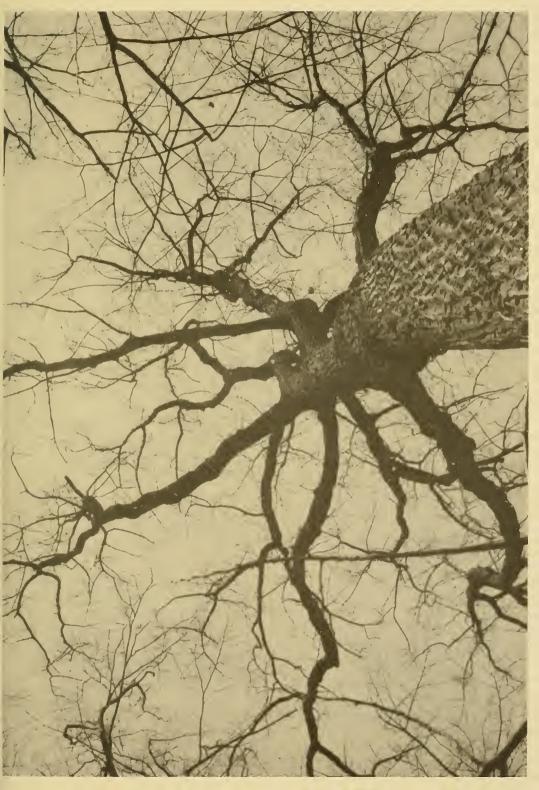
Let me fall in love with a dreamer who will forever understand.
We'd cherish the sun climbing tall trees for fun, and we'd speak by just holding hands.

Fire and hot cider fit for my king . . . Make love among the wildflowers come spring . . .

See the Greatest gift God has Given' the capacity to love each other.

Please just accept me; together we'll be free; like you there'll never be another.

So I wish upon the stars above my dreamer comes and shares all his love.
Karen Kerner





Little dark eyes In a cherubic face. Impish grin, Hair always out of place.

Little fat cheeks And pointed little nose. Chubby hands And fleshy little toes.

Never grow up My tiny little elf, Stay a doll And sit here on my shelf.

Laugh while you play And sing yourself to sleep Hurry not, Your dreams will always keep. Wanda M. Perugini Dribble
Sniff
Need a tissue?
Need a cry?
Shoulder here
Holding and comforting
As the lonely tears run down my face
There once was a time when that solitary tear would have brought the words "baby"
Now the tears bring to mind the word woman.
The emotions have matured
Love has let us mature together
Love has let me cry.
Jill Bitner

Little boy

running on the hillsides soaking in the sunshine learning the beauty of silence

Little boy

camping in the mountians seeking inner silence finding trouble and turmoil

Little boy

growing up in nature growing up with solitude needing time alone.

Little boy

take your time to grow up don't grow up too fast stay a little boy . . . forever.

Jill Bitner

The Population of My Childhood — No. 1: Plain Jane

Throwing a body-block in rough touch or whacking a sponge ball half a block down the street to the railrood during an endless boxball game, Jane easily intimidated all of us. I guess I wasn't any more scared of her than anybody else was, but at the age of twelve I believed that I was: she really terrified me. Also, she was sixteen. I didn't even try to stay on her good side; just out of sight. When she was around the neighborhood — luckily, not too often — she was the center of the gang, and I perched somewhere on the safe outer

perimeter.

Even from a distance, striding across a block-wide, weedy, junky lot at the other end of our street, Jane was unmistakable. The pitch of her shoulders, the bounce in her walk warned of her approach. Nearing the street, Jane's uniform left little doubt that she was not to be messed with: spotless dungarees rolled to just above the ankles; thick, snowy-white socks in brown loafers; a dungaree jacket with its collar turned up: white T-shirt; and short-for-a-girl brown hair combed carefully into an admirable pompador and d.a. combination. Cool and tough. A firm, steady stride reverberated on the cement sidewalk: she wore fifty-cent cleats on the heels of her loafers and twenty-five cent ones on the toes. I dreaded her approach.

Once, moved by some lunatic impulse I guess, I urged several kids to charge down the street with threatening yells to where Jane was approaching. As I recall, she was supposed to feel menaced by this screaming onslaught (I had seen a movie in which the Saracens had successfully used such a strategy). Drunk with my own daring, I led the charge right toward Jane, and I remember with what complete ease she dispatched me and defused everybody else. With a slight croaching down and turn to the right as well as a gentle, well-timed movement forward, she centered her left shoulder into my gut, sending me sprawling with the wind knocked out of my

sails - literally. It was just so easy for her to do.

Jane's prowess at the things street kids admired was epic. More than anything, her pinball technique was a marvel. Like a welltravelled trucker, she drove the pinball machine in the back room of Roxie and Carmen's Polish-American Candy Store. We stood around feeding on penny candy — green leaves and Mary Janes mostly — as well as Wise Potato Chips, drinking Sweetie Beverage's orange soda. The main attraction on some occasions was Jane: my outer perimeter there was feigned disinterest. Powerfully, but with expert delicacy. Jane racked up free game after free game. Flips. dings, flickering diamonds of light, clicks, and the flat, unmelodic "PLACK" of another free game scored — all of this dazzled us. Everything came to an end one Friday night when Roxie threw all of us out and kept tilting the machine to get all the free games off the score board. She swore we had been cheating her. Enraged and righteous — Jane had won the games fairly — we vowed to switch our trade to Joe Weiss' Pharmacy, Jane, however, was totally unmoved. Much later in my life. I learned to call that "grace under pressure."

All this, I guess, is by the way. What prompts me to recall Jane's toughness, her skill, and my own early fears is an event that dispelled the charm — loosely speaking — she had cast on us. Jane had disappeared for a few months. Nobody talked; nobody knew. One late spring afternoon, sunny and breezy, I stood on my front porch waiting for some playing or kids to materialize. Not until she was just about in front of me did I notice her: Jane the prom queen. Half-belligerent, half-apologetic Jane grinned. "Get a load of this," she laughed, "all dolled up for the prom tonight." Somewhere inside me was howling laughter; it could not emerge. As if on stilts, she gingerly made her way down the street, her feet pinched into satin high-heels dved pink to match her voluminous strapless evening dress. Across her shoulders and wrapped around her forearms was about three yards of netting. Her beaded bag swung idiotically from her hand as she tried to keep her balance. The corsage of tiny pink rosebuds had worked its way to the wrong side of her wrist and caught on one of the layers of stiff organdy. Amidst all this finery was the slickly plain pompador - d.a. Incomplete in that way, her transformation seemed hilarious.

Above all else about her that day, Jane's face, her look, stares at me from the picture gallery of my memory. In an instant her grin told me she thought herself laughable but still warned me not to laugh. For the first time, the only time, I saw Jane unsure of herself, trying out girlishness. In that moment she became much less formidable, certainly vulnerable, and I no longer resented her.

Things You Can Do in Your Room.

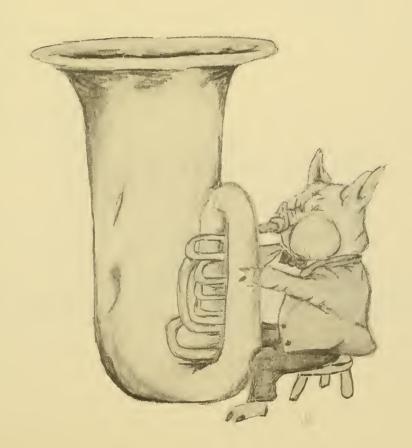
- . . . dance around clothes, miss a step, and not have to laugh at yourself.
- ... look at stupid pictures of yourself and like them.
- . . . daydream yourself to sleep.
- . . . scratch anywhere you want.
- . . . imitate your posters and go straight into a "Concert".
- . . . lay halfway on your hed and slowly slide off.
- . . . yawn out loud.
- . . . just he yourself.

I have a mouth like an oboe
and my body resembles a tank
My bad moods break through sometimes
then I lower in rank.

I tend to be louder than 10 people all combined. My rowdy nature is somewhat crude, I seldom act refined.

People tend to accept me because I do the same And when I make a fool of myself I must accept the blame.

Jill Bitner



Vagabond

Some people adore "well-cultured" roses with perfect proper exactness.
But I prefer to fondle wildflowers radiating true natural beauty.
The rose's stiff stem is choked by weeds while wild flowers thrive even in dry, rocky soil among the twines.
That's why I love you . . .
You're uninhibited like a wildflower.
Karen Kerner





Throughout your mind That pull and tear At your consciousness.

Laugh -And slowly the joy Of life will come welling up Warmth soothing The edges of your soul.

Laugh -The burden of cares Drops off your heart And falls into Insignificance.

Laugh -It's infection draws Upon the lifeblood Of those around And returns, renewing. Laugh. Lorraine Gerus



By learning of life
I am learning to appreciate
By learning of love
I am learning to care
and to be cared for:

By being myself

perhaps I am learning

the greatest lesson of all—

that is how to survive-

Work

Till Bitner

In the moon is seen a sadness
The watcher of the night
Knows the secrets of the darkness
Not disclosed in the light
Mystery in the shadows
Can't avoid her pearly glow
Forgotten in the sunshine
But the moon will always know
And the stars will whisper
Her secrets as she wanes
Even in the darkness
The secrets do remain
—Joann Hawk

Where will you run to When the road finally ends? You go in a straight line Ignoring the bends It can't go on forever, What your life's become The time has come to pay the debt For things you've left undone You're avoiding the feelings-Keep all emotion denied Your cool has turned to coldness-You've never cried One of these days You'll have to give in . . . What will you do when the road finally wins? - Joann Hawk

Mind Erosion

- Joann Hawk

Dreams in a childproof cap Eradicate your worries with a capsule snap Time released visions obscure what is real Fade into oblivion-you've no ability to feel Or laugh Or smile Or cry A daily dosage gets you by Sees you through the morning pain And takes what sanity remains The grasp is now beyond you, so you've come to find The harmony has faded with the erosion of your mind To late Too late to turn around, you can't erase the past Too late Too late to change your ways, the end is coming fast The earth revolves around you The tightening of the screw One fine day the lid will drop Then what will you do?

A Man

Creature of habit
So routine
The life he leads is so serene
The life he leads is void of dreams
It's early to bed
And to rise
Trapped in the cage he's devised
Nothing escapes but his sighs
Maybe it makes him
Healthy, wealthy, and wise
But what memory remains
When the man dies?

— Joann Hawk

IGNORANCE

Ignorance Surrounds us Like a blanket on an infant: Shielding and protecting us From the unknown. What the future will bring Is hidden in a vault Safe from greedy seekers. So we may hope for light When there is but darkness And pray for warmth When there is no heat. Encompassed by Deep faith, We trudge on: Not knowing, but trusting, Not seeking, but hoping — Believing that we Exercise unfaltering control Over predestined fates. lanorance Surrounds us Like a blanket on an infant. Wanda M. Perugini

Advanced Arthrodialism

The crab is mostly exoskeleton Its countenance scares me to gelatin On sight of any carapace To turn and flee there's n'ar a place.

With speed the mighty dactylus Transports the crab so tactyless. Professors warn it is behooving To lift your feet and toes while moving Across the sandy ocean floors Crustacean sites for podite wars.

Appendages, pinnately chelae
A painful pinch these claws can relay,
Barth's organ vibes sound from its merus
Relentlessly not meant to "spare us"
Unlike the hymns in church cathedrals
The crab hunts prey with tunes that he drills

To me, the stridulation's odious, Yet Mulstay rates it more melodious. His partial verve for kin of cancer, Is not my favorite course enhancer.





Sugar?
Please.
One pack?
Two,

thankyou. You're welcome.

The time?
4:30.
No!
Late?
Yes!
Finish. . .
Can't!
Tomorrow?
Yes.
Till then.
Good-bye.

Linda H. Hahn



Why's

Life is A continual state of confusion. Unanswered why's Drift about like wispy clouds Present on even the sunniest of days. Why have things happened The way they have? And why are there no answers To the why's? There are so many things Cluttering up my mind. I don't understand Anything that has happened lately. One dark, tangled mass of strings And I am no good with knots I haven't the patience To sit here and try to free Each individual thread. And, if I did, Would that really be the key To my understanding? Someone once told me "Life has no because." - Wanda M. Perugini



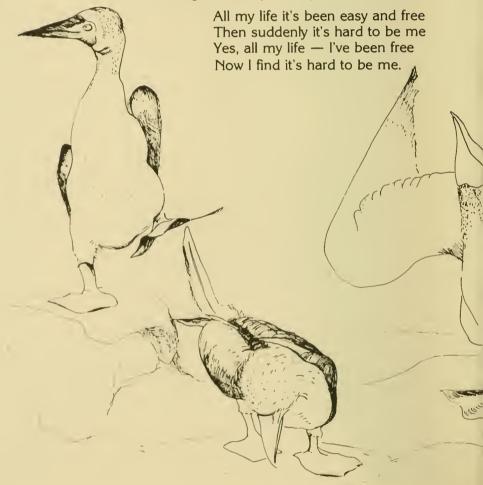
Hard To Be Me

As I sit in the morning light I can see your eyes twinkling, so very bright And I think of the love that was tender and dear Remembering now that you're not very near.

Chorus:

All my life it's been easy and free Then suddenly it's hard to be me Yes, all my life — I've been free Now I find it's hard to be me.

The days are long ones — just waiting to hear If the love we had is still quite so clear Just sitting and waiting close by the phone And thinking of the day when you will come home.

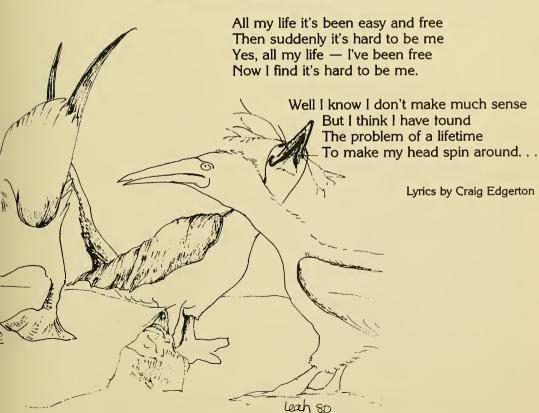


Your love is like the warm summer days, Which are kept warm and bright with your kind truthful ways My mind is full of memories of the past And hoping that our love will always last.

As I lay back and look up at the stars I remind myself now the ends not very far Decisions are going to have to be made Before time's all over, and mem'ries just fade

All my life it's been easy and free Then suddenly it's hard to be me Yes, all my life — I've been free Now I find it's hard to be me.

But until nature takes me and sprinkle my ash They say you must "live life" and make a big smash And I'm not sure it's true for sometimes it's said Why not sleep your life away in a bed. . .







It was an ordinary but incredible winter night, typical of all nature. The sun had not long ago slipped under the horizon, not to sleep, but to start a new day for another patch of earth. One last ray exerted all its remaining energy to pull the moon around, temporarily replacing the fire opal. The brilliance of the moon, a diamond, gave the entire peacock blue sky a shining glaze. Not alone for long, the diamond was soon joined by a random splash of tiny rhinestones of stars, which continued to increase as the sky darkened. The jewels, no longer illuminating the whole sky, shone their individual radiance against the black velvet cloth. Through a window, the moon's light was reflected in a cross shape, as if in tribute to its creator. Man, built with the greatest mind of all creatures on earth, learns some of the mechanics of nature, and boasts intelligence, yet still he leaves many of nature's wonders unexplained. Try though he can and ponder as he might, his finite mind can not explain infinity; theory after theory discounted, and estimate after estimate enlarged, yet nature remains, to baffle each succeeding generation of "intelligent" creatures.

Terminating Love

The love between,
The love that was shared
Has now forever
Crumbled in despair.

Eyes once saw
Two visions as one.
Lives were filled
With the brilliance of the sun.

But love seemed to weaken, It wasn't getting better. The love no longer Bonded two lives together.

A new beginning,
One must cope.
The future destines
Rejection, but also hope.
Scott Abrams

MEMORIES

Memories woven in our lives Like the threads of a tapestry Each thread a remembrance.

It seems like only yesterday, I remember well the past.

Memories-aged photographs of yesteryear A brief glimpse of days gone by, Hazy pictures fade with time.

A tattered tapestry of lingering thoughts
Of those you've met,
Those times so special
And those whom you'll never forget.
D.M. Fosbrook

Now in thy youth, beseech Him
Who giveth upbraiding not
That His light in thy heart become not dim,
And His love be unforgot
And thy God, in the darkest of days shall be
Greenness, and beauty, and strength, to thee.
Michael Kriebel



Lovers may come and lovers may go, Because love very often dies, But when your lover is your best friend The love seems to sweeten day by day Sharing dreams, thoughts and countless good times

Never fearing to laugh or cry around him Knowing there's no need to measure words I can be a child or a woman and still be accepted.

The loving itself has a magical depth

A touch or a look.says more than words could ever transmit

My friend gives me space to grow and to be me.

And if I need to be alone, he'll go
Though never too far out of reach.
He holds me and I feel secure
There's a patience and understanding that others can't comprehend

This relationship seems so easy
There is little need for work or compromise
Maybe this is the love that you can build on for a lifetime.
I hope so because my Lover is my best friend.

– Terri Domagela

Slim McGuire

The young boy's name was Slim McGuire Whose strange desire was starting fire This son of chief of firemen Was thought to be a terror when, He came to set your house aflame And then refused to take the blame. His father always trusted him And never wondered, where was Slim, While all this trouble did arise "Slim must be playing," he'd surmise. Until to Slim's deserved unluck. He just was found beneath the truck Igniting the new fire hose, Directly under the chief's nose. But to the citizen's amaze, Slim's passion was just called a phase! - Leah Brindley

Once again was that time of year when everything bursts into a world of green, warmth and beauty. When everyones' life is full of vim and vigor. Everyone crawls out of their caves of hibernation and comes alive into the world again.

Tis the season of physical exercise, dieting and health assessment; all the fighting and sweating to have that "beautiful bod" look on

the cover of COSMOPOLITAN.

But then there are those few poor unfortunate souls that are plagued with a yearly upper respiratory infection. Those few are subjected to sticky-sheeted hot beds all day, bloating their body's with Nestea and Diet Pepsi. Yes, once again I was one of those poor unfortunate souls.

During the winter months while everyone runs around sniffling with Marcals stuffed up their nostrils, I remain bone dry. But come the warm weather I become so congested that breathing can be a pure crucifixion. My sneezes are worse than a nuclear bomb explosion. Eyes watering, nose dripping, pulsating headache, all combined make me feel like a zombie. I walk around with a bottle of Bayer and a box of Marcal tissues; my trusty do-it-at-home first aid equipment.

Every year I have the decision. Should I waste thirty bucks and go see a doctor so he can tell me to drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of of rest or say it to myself? I decided to visit our friendly

family physician.

I finally made it, driving behind my tissues, to the upper class neighborhood with rolling sod lawns and white gravel driveways. Ringing the bell I entered the side door. The fume of isopropyl alcohol cleared my nasal passages in a whiff. I sat down on an immaculate squeaky vinyl couch. Rummaging through a GOOD HOUSEKEEPING and SPORTS AFIELD I picked up a HUMPTY DUMPTY and looked for the hidden carrots page.

The nurse behind the counter gave me a dirty look and spoke,

"The Doctor will be with you in a moment, MA'AM!"

Down the hall some kid gave an ear-piercing yell. A chill ran up my spine. Obviously a hypodermic syringe victim. It brought back horrifying memories but I pushed them aside and concentrated on my carrot hunt.

Finally the nurse led me down the hall to a small examination room. I glanced up at the Hippocratic Oath framed on the wall.

Humph! What duty to mankind? It was all for the money.

The nurse placed a card on the desk, pointed to my shoes and said, "I'll do your weight and height now before the doctor comes."

WEIGHT! How I hate that word. She couldn't weigh me now, not after I crawled out of my cave of hibernation! It wasn't fair. I hadn't a chance to lose any winter buldge yet!

I was afraid to look standing on that devilish machine. I tried several attempts at holding my breath hoping that more air in my body would make me lighter like a balloon. But my face got red and I began gasping for air. I had to make a sound like a fake cough when she looked at me and said, "You alright?" Then she yelled out my weight so everyone in the whole building could hear.

After taking my height she made me sit on the crackly papered examination table. She departed and I was left to infect the room for

the next victim.

Soon the doctor entered. Eveing my card with experienced bifocals he told me I hadn't had a checkup in a year. "I'll just give you one now. You get this problem every year?"

"Yeah"

"Stuffy nose?"

"Yeah"

"Sore throat, cough?"

"Yeah"

"Eyes bothering you?"

"Yeah." He had my whole life diagnosed on that little white card. Why did I even bother coming when he could of just examined the card.

Reaching into a ancient white drawer, he pulled out an odoscope and stuck it in my ear. I knew I should of cleaned the wax out before I came. I could just picture the instrument getting stuck in there. He came close, breathing his hot anticepitic breath on my neck. Then he reversed his tactics and hit my other side.

Ramming an oversized popsicle stick down my throat, he depressed my tongue. It tasted so woody. Finished with the instrument, he tossed it into the precautionary sanitation devise.

Placing the ice cold stethoscope on my back he made me breath.

All the while the crinkly paper crinkled.

Handing me a smaller beaker he said, "Here, I'll need a sputum

sample," and left the room.

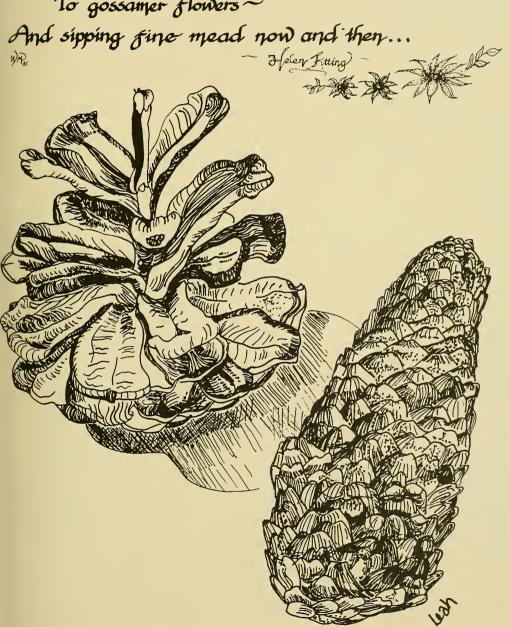
A sputum sample? What's that? Now I knew what a urine sample was but not a sputum. Thinking that maybe it meant the other end, I walked into the small lavatory in the corner of the room. After several attempts I refused to try any longer. I just couldn't, so I returned to the crinkly paper.

The doctor returned and looked puzzeled at my empty beaker. I confessed, saying, "Sorry, I can't. I just did this morning."

"What? Spit?"

Linda H. Hahn

A Wood-Nymph reposed in her den.
Singing for hours—
To gossamer flowers—





Three Generations

By Gabe Hanson

The old home place in West Tennessee sits on the end of a long, low ridge. Its pasture slopes down from the back yard. A creek divides the pasture and beyond it the town begins. From town the farmhouse looks like it's sitting on top of a hill, so folks named it Tidwell Hill after my family. The place has been in the family about seventy years. First my grandparents had it, then my cousin,

I pulled in there one afternoon not many years ago with my wife and kids on a visit. The place was already swarming with kinfolk but my daddy and I strolled off by ourselves, making small talk and sorta getting reacquainted. We ventured into the pasture a way and my daddy stopped and said, I was right here when it started. It was a hot, sunny day in the springtime. I must'a been seven, a regular little barefoot boy with his raggedy britches held up with a piece of binder twine.

Well now, thinks I, this is going to be amusing. Daddy is fixing to make a confession, by the look of him, and he can't help it, the past has fastened onto him so. He's already looking like a little kid again, gray hair and all. So let's give a listen, I tells myself and I needed the reminder, for his opening remarks had sent me on a memory trip of my own. I'd also stood in the pasture on such spring days, a little bareheaded city kid, feeling the sun heating my head through my topknot. And I'd smell the sweet smells of rambunctious growth on the breeze and the rank smell of the sun-warmed yellow clay that bore all the life. What a mixture!

My daddy was saying, I happened to see a strange dog coming through the yard. It went for the pen of ewes and lambs that stood between me and the barn. It was a mighty sorry sort of stray, not above middling large size, just skin and bones and shaggy hair where the mange hadn't taken over. Still, the way it patrolled around the pen led me to believe I was watching a healthy, hungry wolf.

I'll tell you, Tennessee was poor back then. Country people hadn't any lambs to spare. A stray dog, even off a neighbor's place, going after livestock'd get itself shot in short order and the folks thankful it'd been fool enough to show itself while there was daylight to sight it by. But this hound wasn't in mortal danger yet. The menfolk were away planting cotton on the farm my daddy's daddy sharecropped and his mother wouldn't handle a gun. So she and the girls raised a fuss to frighten the stray and someone ran off to spread the news. The stray dog looked at them hopping around in the back yard so close by and he stopped his prowling along the fence and chose a spot by it and lay himself down and gaped wide and licked his chops and went back to studying the sheep.

Daddy and his mamma went looking for their dog, Red. He was a big dog with long, red hair; must'a' been a setter. They found him denned in the cool dirt under the side porch of the house. He came out and went with them to the back yard but he paid them no mind when they sicced him on the stray. Instead he went back up under the house and stayed put. It gave Daddy the creeps to see his Red play the coward to another dog in his own yard. And rightly so. There lay the cur a stone's throw away acting proud of itself, like it was the lambs' best friend and guard and wouldn't let the noisy neighbor women and children distract it from its duty.

The farm my granddaddy sharecropped wasn't but a mile down the road but on days when he was in the fields, he never showed up at home till after dark. His notion of a dinner hour was to pull a sandwich out of his jacket and eat it with one hand while keeping on down the row; never mind that he'd been working since first light and wouldn't quit till dark. Needless to tell, he worked his hired hands just as hard. But this day, for the sake of his sheep, when dinnertime came, he went home. He left his oldest son out there and brought his middle son and a town boy about his age — the town boy probably just to feed, since he was a starveling often in need of my grandparents' vittles. So the three of them had a quick look at the strayed dog and went in the house and had dinner; and I expect the rest of the crew on the farm enjoyed themselves a furlough.

Soon as they'd eaten the father sent the town boy into town in the flivver to see if he could find anyone to claim the strayed dog. (I just remember that boy's name. It was Moses MacManus; I met him once. He was back for a visit, his first in about thirty years, I reckon, and he stopped by the farm. He'd lost his boy in Korea not long before. He had a smile that day that told it all.) I don't know if the boss-man sent into town to soothe his wife's feelings - she was in the SPCA and temperance society and every other conscientious outfit around - but it was a shilly-shally thing to do, even though the town was so near and easy to canvas, being mostly a few dirt streets on the wrong side of the Illinois Central Railroad tracts, and it brought him trouble. Two no-accounts looking to have some fun at a dog's expense rode back with Moses, both armed. The one fellow worked at the gas station, the other made his living selling whisky on Saturday nights. Prohibition gave him his chance in life. Come to think of it, Obion County is dry to this day . . . So with the neighbor girls and their younguns, there was a big get-together.

Granddaddy had to raise his voice to make himself heard. This ain't no Sunday-school picnic, he said, at which the women took fright and went to shut their little ones in the house away from the

shooting and the little ones scooted away and the rest chased after them, while Granddaddy offered the moonshiner and the mechanic a drink if they'd go sit in the swing while he shot the dog. Of course they wouldn't be bought off, they were out for glory. So he talked to them while the womenfolk were getting their children shut indoors. Shooting a dog, not sheep or each other, was the likely gist of his remarks.

My daddy won permission to stay in the back yard with Moses where he could see the action up close, which was his reward for keeping his eye on the strayed dog part of the morning and into the afternoon. So he watched his father march off, an infantry at either shoulder and his teen-age son a step behind carrying a spade, the quartermaster corps. Daddy said he noticed all of a sudden how quiet it'd gotten. The breeze had died down; the sheep were used to their mangy buddy by then; the men weren't saying anything; the grass wasn't talking to their shoes; and the sun lay real quiet on their hats (the father's would'a' been a fedora, that's what he always wore, or the remnants of one) and on their rifle barrels.

Daddy was watching the dog watch the men close in on him. It got up with a lurch and bobbed its head and Daddy's heart jumped into his mouth. The dog was standing its ground, making no sound that he could hear, panting fast. The men wanted to head it out to the pature but it wouldn't go. When they were almost treading on it, it finally wheeled and trotted away, but not far. They followed right behind it and Granddaddy was warning it off and waggling his rifle at it.

Now that man was no hunter; he wouldn't even fish; he'd never lopped a balky mule's ear with his whip, like plenty of farmers and mule skinners did; he'd never even cut a hog's throat. To kill hogs, that's what he'd bought the single-shot .22 rifle that he was carrying for. He figured a bullet in the brain was painless for a hog and bleeding to death wasn't. The other farmers said he risked the blood not draining freely and spoiling the meat. With all that against him, if he hadn't had such a frightful appetite for work and hadn't been the best mule skinner, too, that anyone knew of, he might'a' lost his standing in the community. And that meant more to him than money.

It was clear to me, as my daddy told it, that that ugly stray dog had won him over. He knew it wouldn't run; knew it would get shot; knew that was right and needful but just couldn't reconcile himself to it. Hadn't reconciled himself to it all those years later. Run, you old dog, he was thinking. Go on, git! Just think how he must'a' flinched when he saw his daddy's gun barrel jump, heard the popping of that powder.

The dog humped its back and started off at a pretty good clip. slanting away from the firing squad; and caught some more lead and changed direction again, rifles still popping; then finally went down. Whoops, its legs start thrashing, he's up and slewing around and the moonshiner and the gas station fellow are cussing in panicky voices and back in the yard Moses is grinding his teeth and Daddy has gone white in the face and staring, Pop! pop! pop! and the dog is dragging his hind legs, not a sound from him, hardly progressing, but heading back toward the penned ewes and lambs now and the teenage son is sitting on the pasture grass and the town boys are dangling their rifles trying to breathe and granddaddy gets another round into the chamber and sidles up to the dog and pulls back the hammer and puts the muzzle where it's nearly touching the dog's head and pulls the trigger and the dog is flat now but he's kicking and the man studies it before he turns his back to it, his head still down. He looked at his boy and said, give me the spade, son. And the sun was making the sky like white hot brass.

I could see that my daddy still blamed his father. Blame him one minute, worship him the next, must'a' been his way for a long time afterward. He ran away from home when he was twelve, rode the rods to California and back when the Depression struck and took off for good when he finished college. He had a hardware-chain job in Knoxville, clear across the state, when I came along, his elder son; then he became an officer in the Navy during World War Two, had a destroyer escort sunk right out from under him by a Jap bomber and wasn't I the proudest little boy in the whole school! And so on. But he'd fight with his daddy, run away, come back, then do something he'd get a whipping for and go off again. He didn't make peace with Grandaddy until he had it clear in his own mind that there was no chance he'd ever be a farmer.

So I asked him, just to see if he'd catch on to himself, you don't blame your father for that dog's death, do you? Oh no, he said, it was just my daddy's bad luck that old dog took so much killing. Why I remember the moonshiner was telling it around that your granddaddy finally resorted to a silver bullet to kill the dog, proving it was a werewolf. And even while he explained himself to me, I saw the uneasy shadow in his eyes.

Being two different generations of men, they didn't see things the same. My granddaddy was a real old-timer, a Johnny Reb's son. He took no pleasure from slaughtering hogs but how he relished their flesh! He always cured the finest Tennessee country hams and bacon, even after he got too old to farm. So you see, having to slaughter his meat didn't spoil his appetite. While my daddy loves his ham, too — though he doesn't carry on over it like his daddy did — he probably couldn't eat pork he'd slaughtered. We're a later breed still and still more squeamish about such things, I believe.

And I wonder how we'd'a' handled a dog like that one. It acted like a regular Russian of a dog — like that mad-monk Rasputin that wouldn't leave the women alone and wouldn't die when the husbands went to kill him until he made them kill him ten times over just to revenge himself on them. See there, I'm making the dog out to be an evil force; but it wasn't anything but a creature that hard luck drove to desperation. It's the way you see things that counts. Some folks'd think, I'm nice, this world's a nice place and that's a nice doggie; they'd lose a few lambs. Other folks'd think, that aint's no dog, it's another Adolf Hitler and they'd declare another World War Two on it and some innocent bystanders'd get shot along with some sheep. It was his sense of duty that carried my grandfather through. He was killing the strayed dog as a duty and so he could kill it and pity it at the same time.

The habit of duty was my grandfather's mainstay but he had other resources besides, ceremony for instance. You never saw a more ceremonious man. Plenty of men will just naturally add a touch or two of ceremony to the laying of a fire on their hearths but my granddaddy put so much ceremony into it, when he'd go to warm up his parlor after supper, that a holy hush would settle on us young'uns and we'd sit there and watch that fire burn in reverent awe. He'd express his satisfaction and settle himself in his chair and light his pipe and before long you'd see his pipe fall in his lap and he'd be sleeping like a baby. He was an old man by then, of course.

So after he shot that stray dog, he gave it funeral rites. He carried it away over to the creek bank and plied his spade in the earth till he had a deep hole. He buried it better than he had to and sacrificed another half-hour or more of daylight that he needed for the cotton-planting to do it. It was like he had to make up for the killing he'd done.

His actions were all of a piece and somehow it all grew from or connected with the way he practiced his husbandry; with a sense of duty and a liberal view of nature and man, as if life and death were a team of mules pulling together in the traces, and the farmer had to keep them pulling evenly so they shared the work.





